

# AMBIT NETWORK

Navigating research and practice in child trauma

## Developing a Clearer Picture: Understanding Parenting Capacity Assessments, Psychological Evaluations, and Trauma Assessments

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*Navigating Research and Practice in Child Trauma*

## MN National Child Traumatic Stress Network Treatment and Services Center

- [www.ambitnetwork.org](http://www.ambitnetwork.org) and [www.nctsn.org](http://www.nctsn.org).

- ❑ Project Co-Directors: Drs. Abi Gewirtz and Chris Bray
- ❑ Purpose: to raise the standard of care and improve access to services for traumatized children, their families, and their communities.

*Trauma Assessment*

Parental  
Competency

Psychological  
Evaluation

Diagnostic Assessment

# Diagnostic Assessment

- Adult or Child
- When to refer:
  - To determine the presence of a mental health diagnosis
  - To determine which services are medically necessary to treat the mental health diagnosis
- Process:
  - Face-to-face interview (main source of information)
  - Review of records/collateral information
  - Written report

# Diagnostic Assessment

- A brief assessment
- Does not typically include norm-referenced tests
- Can be completed by any licensed MH professional
- Outlined in MN Statute 9505.0370 to 9505.0372 & DHS Administrative Rule 47

# DA Components

- **Reason for the assessment**
  - Who referred and why
  - Client's perception of his or her condition
  - Sources of collateral information
- **Current life situation**
  - Basic needs
  - Education
  - Employment

# DA Components

- **Life History and Current Circumstances**

*What is the context of their life?*

- Developmental
- Relationships
- Education
- Employment
- Medical Issues
- Mental Health Treatment
- Legal Involvement and History



# DA Components

- Current Substance Use
  - Past Substance use and treatment
- Mental Status Exam
- Cultural Practices
- Strengths and Available Resources
- Risk Assessment—harm to self and others

# DA Components

- **Description of symptoms**
  - Symptoms endorsed
  - Symptoms denied
  - Frequency, intensity, and duration
  - Functional Impairment
  - Level of distress caused
  - How do symptoms interfere with life

# DA Components

- **DSM 5 Diagnosis**

- Symptoms to meet diagnosis
- Explain rule outs/Other diagnosis considered
- Thought process to reach diagnostic conclusion
- Why alternative diagnoses that were considered and ruled out

***This should make sense to a non-clinician!***

# DA Components

## Clinical Summary

- Clinical formulation of cause of client's mental health symptoms, prognosis, and likely consequences of the symptoms
- Analysis of how the diagnosis interacts/impacts with client's life
- Should give you a snapshot of the available information.

# DA Components

- **Recommendations**

- Treatment that is medically necessary
- What such treatment should address
- Factors that may inhibit participation
- Recommendations for referrals
- Identification of the potential consequences of not following through

# Red Flags

- No life history or other context
- Only symptoms reported are those that align with diagnosis
- The summary does not make sense
- Over reaching statements, opinions that are not outlined as opinions, broad and generalized statements
- Absence of recommendations
- Recommendations that address someone other than who was referred

# Diagnostic Assessment that includes a Trauma Assessment

- Trauma assessments should not be done without other diagnostic information
- Can be done by licensed mental health professionals that have additional training on the use of trauma assessments
- Beware of the “*trauma informed*” clinician who does not include assessment data

# Trauma Assessments

## **When to refer**

- Presence of a Traumatic Event—known or strongly suspected
- To determine the affect of a traumatic event on life and current circumstances
- To contextualize traumatic stress with other symptoms
- To obtain recommendations about treatment of trauma related to other MH needs



# Trauma Assessment Instruments

## Children

### Examples:

- Trauma Symptom Checklist for Young Children
- Trauma Symptom Checklist for Children
- UCLA PTSD Reaction Index
- Child PTSD Symptom Scale
- SCARED for Anxiety & PTSD
- PTSD Checklist

## Adults

### Examples:

- Trauma Symptom Inventory
- Trauma Assessment for Adults
- Life Stressor Checklist-Revised
- PTSD Checklist for Adults
- Post-traumatic Stress Diagnostic Scale (PDS)
- Traumatic Experiences Checklist
- Clinician Administered PTSD Scale for Adults (CAPS)

# Trauma Assessment Red Flags

- Minor or unclear traumatic event was the basis for the assessment—was there fishing
- Absence of assessment instruments
- Trauma explains all symptoms
- Recommendations do not address if, when, or how trauma should be treated

# Psychological Evaluations

- The use of standardized instruments and systematic procedures to assess a patient's affective, cognitive, perceptual, visual-motor and/or verbal functioning.
- Should address the presence of current or past trauma
- May include a trauma assessment

# Psychological Evaluations

- Completed by Licensed Psychologist with training in evaluations
- *Referral questions/goals of the evaluation are important*
  - How does their mental health issue affect their ability to interact with others?
- Should use multiple data points
- Should differentiate inferences, conclusions, and opinions

# Psychological Evaluations

## **When to refer:**

- To clarify MH diagnosis
- To determine mental capacity
- To obtain thorough information about affect of mental health on functioning across domains
- Assess interaction of intellectual functioning, personality, MH diagnosis, etc.
- Provide recommendations for treatment

# What Should Be In An Evaluation Report?

Everything from a DA plus:

- Court order and identifying data
- Sources of information (interviews, tests, records, contacts)
- Psycho-legal questions and the answer
- Recommendations
- Test results
- Collateral information

# Intellectual Capacity vs. Adaptive Functioning

Intellectual capacity as measured by IQ

- Direct measure of client performance
- Influenced by education
- Influenced by emotional factors
- Does not measure parenting abilities

Adaptive functioning

- Reflects functioning in real world
- Assess: responsibility, coping
- Allows for comparative observations by others
- No more time consuming than IQ
- Used in conjunction with IQ tests

# **All Tests are Not Created Equal—**

## **Ensure Tests are Standardized, Valid, Reliable, Norm Referenced**

Wechsler Tests of  
Intelligence

MMPI-2/MMPI-A

MCMI-III

PAI

PSI

Rorschach

Child Behavior Checklist

WISC

WAIS

**A brief explanation of the  
test should be included in  
the report.**

**Other tests may be of value  
when combined with other  
information, but the author  
should be clear about which  
type was used.**



# Psychological Evaluations with a Parenting Focus

- **When to refer**

- Parental Capacity Evaluation is not available or unnecessary
- To determine affect of mental health, intellectual functioning, personality issues, insight, etc. on ability to parent

## **Include information in Psychological Evaluation plus:**

- Thoughts about situation that led to referral
- Parenting Interview

# Parenting Interview

- Child's development
- Parenting skills and knowledge
- Perceived needs of the child
- Knowledge of medical needs
- Knowledge of educational needs
- Basic nutritional knowledge
- Need for child's protection
- Ways protection might take place
- Discipline techniques
- Perceptions about reunification
- Reactions to interventions
- Attainment of new skills

# Psych Evaluation Red Flags

- Lack or paucity of standardized or norm referenced assessments/only involve checklists
- Lack of multiple data points
- Failure to reconcile or address incongruent information
- Providing opinions or recommendations without the data to support the statement
- Dual Relationships

# Psych Evaluation with Parenting Component Red Flags

- Include an assessment of the child or opinions about the child's treatment or needs outside of development
- Do not address how parenting needs may change in time
- Parenting recommendations are based on continued involvement of others

# Parental Competency Evaluations

- Ordered to recommend appropriate treatment for remediating behavior, or if such remediation is possible (APA Practice Guidelines)
- “Assist in identifying poor prognosis, to target any red flags for successful outcomes, and to offer services and recommendations for the family.” (MN Judges Juvenile Protection Benchbook, Nov. 2011)

# Parental Capacity

- Consider questions in one or more of the following domains:
  - Capacity to care, nurture, and be involved
  - Capacity to protect—supervision, frustration tolerance, impulse control
  - Capacity to Change—Intelligence, response to interventions, recognition of need to change (Haynes 2010)

# Parenting Capacity Evaluations

- Not always needed
- Addresses risk, safety, and resiliency related to parenting
- Includes one or more observations of parent-child interactions
  - Assessment Instruments
    - The Differential Assessment Tool
    - Parent-Child Interaction Assessment II
    - Adult Adolescent Parenting Inventory

# Assessment Instruments

- The Differential Assessment Tool
- Parent-Child Interaction Assessment II
- Adult Adolescent Parenting Inventory



# Parental Capacity Red Flags

- Fails to address parent-child dynamics
- Does not address child safety
- Does not support conclusions with data
- Fails to account for cultural context
- Does not address evolving child needs
- Dual Relationships

We have the report,  
now what?

Questions??

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